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ABSTRACT

A profile of the role and status of the English language in Lesotho, Africa, is presented. The following topics are outlined: (1) the extent of the use of English as the second official language; (2) instruction in English at the elementary and secondary levels and at each of the postsecondary institutions in the country; (3) the number, ratio, and training of English teachers at all levels; (4) instructional materials commonly used at all levels; (5) administration of related instructional programs; (6) English teaching program development; (7) British, American, and other agency support for the teaching of English; (8) opportunities for development of commercial English materials; (9) creative writing; and (10) sources of further information. It is found that although the need for English training is growing in Lesotho, there is no coherent public policy regarding its use or instruction, and standards of spoken and written English appear to be getting worse. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: LESOTHO

Date: OCTOBER 1983

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

Sesotho is the first language of almost all Basotho (though there are small groups of Xhosa and Nguni speakers in the Kingdom). English is the other official language. Lesotho was under British protection and administration for nearly a century. It remains a member of the Commonwealth and has strong political links with other former British possessions in Africa. Economically it is very dependent on South Africa, and a large proportion of Basotho males spend much of their working lives as contract workers in the mines of South Africa. English is therefore widely understood and used. It is the medium of communication in Government, the High Courts and business, and is the alternative language of the National Assembly. Lesotho also receives large amounts of technical assistance from overseas, which contributes further to the use of English among urban Basotho.

English is very widely spoken and understood; even in remote rural villages people can be found who can converse at basic level. In the towns it is spoken and understood by nearly everyone. This is in part due to the fact that it is a useful medium in the Republic of South Africa where many of the men have worked or are working. Films, books, television (South African programmes can be received in the lowlands) and English language newspapers are fairly widely available. Lesotho has reputedly one of the highest literacy rates in Africa. The present standards of English are said to be falling, which is deplored by older Basotho who were educated as part of an elite many years ago.

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2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The school system in Lesotho is based on seven years of primary education (in Standards 1-7) followed by secondary education for five years. Formal education at both levels is largely in the hands of religious missions. The age range in each school year varies widely, and there is considerable wastage at every stage. More women than men work as teachers, and, in both primary and secondary schools, more girls than boys are enrolled as pupils.

Primary

The aim of the Primary English Syllabus is to prepare children for English as a medium of instruction for all subjects except Sesotho by the end of the fourth year of primary school. The first year is in theory mainly given over to oral work with some pre-reading and pre-writing activities. The number of hours prescribed each week for English is as follows (the number for Sesotho is given as a comparison).

Standards	English	Sesotho
1	3 hours 30 mins	4 hours
2 and 3	6 hours	4 nours
4 and 5	6 hours 30 mins	4 hours
6 and 7	6 hours 40 mins	3 hours 20 mins

Details of the English Syllabus are to be found in the official Primary English Syllabus, published by the Ministry of Education in 1982.

Secondary

Most schools are independently controlled and practice varies, but from seven to ten 40-minute periods a week are usual, and more when literature is studied as an examination subject in the fourth and fifth years.

The system to be introduced in 1983 means that English, as before, will be the medium of instruction for all subjects except Sesotho. The syllabus will now be a five-year one to Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) level. All children must pass in English language to be awarded that Certificate: in practice over 80% of E form (fifth year) students will also be studying for English Literature as a separate subject. At the end of the third year of secondary school there will now be an intermediate examination (equal to Junior Certificate Examination or JC) and in theory only those children who pass with sufficiently high grades will be allowed to continue into the High School years (four and five). The admission of students is in the hands of individual schools however, and standards are likely to vary quite widely. Both Primary and Secondary Inspectors of English are now permanently placed in the National Curriculum Development Centre in Maseru, with the result that very little visiting of schools takes place. There are English Panels for both primary and secondary English which meet regularly and advise on the curriculum and the examinations. The choice of textbooks is largely in the hands of individual schools though they are advised by the Ministry on this point.

Until the end of the third secondary year English literature is studied in Lesotho, if at all, as an aid to language learning. Thereafter, it is studied in a few secondary schools for the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate, and also by undergraduates majoring in English at the National University. There 'Literature' is interpreted and justified as meaning 'Literature in English' and special attention is paid to modern

African writers. Except by students and academics, imaginative literature is not widely read here, either in its original languages or in Sesotho translations. Even African literature composed in, or translated into, English appears to be valued more for its social or historical significance than for its literary qualities. Older schoolchildren and college or university students do, however, enjoy film versions of literary classics.

There is a literary element in examinations for the Junior (Secondary) Certificate awarded by the Examinations Council for Lesotho and Swaziland, in the COSC Literature paper, and in certain degree examinations at the National University of Lesotho. The number of students engaged in literary studies for these examinations is small. (Up-to-date COSC syllabuses can most easily be obtained from Cambridge.)

National Teacher Training College

The great majority of entrants to the College have only had three years of secondary English, which means the standard is generally low considering that the students are destined to teach in English as well as teach the subject itself. In a week of 37 contact hours, five hours are available for English (language, literature and ELT (English Language Teaching) methods in the first and third years of studies. Year Two is an internship year in the primary school.

The National University of Lesotho

All students who enter the University must have a pass at COSC level in English. Then during the first year virtually all students must take and pass 'Communication Skills' as part of the Common First Year programme. This comprises six hours a week of reading, writing and comprehension in English for arts and humanities students (three hours a week for science students).

English is a subject taken commonly by arts and education students at the National University. A typical arts graduate would be a student majoring in English, Sesotho and education to gain a BA (Education) degree. The main emphasis in English teaching at the University falls on literature, with a large 'African literature in English' emphasis, but English language and linguistics courses must be taken by English majors in the second, third and final years.

Other Tertiary Education Institutions

Courses in English are offered to students at the National Agriculture College, the Lerotholi Technical Institute and at the Police College in Maseru.

Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre

This institution offers courses in English by means of correspondence and radio at levels from beginner to Cambridge Overseas Certificate level. It publishes well-designed ELT materials aimed at helping students through the Junior Certificate and COSC examinations in English.

Other provision of English

No private schools of English are at present known to the writer. The World University Service on NUL Campus, Roma, and some day schools also offer night school courses for JC and COSC examinations in the main towns.

English for Specific Purposes

Apart from 'English for Educational Purposes' offered to part-time students of education at the National University, English courses are usually of a general remedial type.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

For the Primary Sector the number of teachers in 1980 was as follows:

School enrolment in thousands	235	
Trained teachers	3287	
Untrained teachers	1764	(34.9%)
Total	5051	

Average pupil/teacher ratio 46.5 : 1

For the Secondary Sector (1980)

Enrolment		23354	
All subjects	(Qualified Teachers	881	
	(Unqualified Teachers	241	(21.5%)
	Total	1122	

Average pupil/teacher ratio 20.8 : 1

Ministry of Education figures do not break down the number of English teachers since most teach one other subject as well. At a guess, the figures for 1980 were:

English Teachers

Local	220
Expatriate	100
Total	320

The Training of English Teachers

Primary Sector
From the National Teacher Training College (1980)

All subjects Primary Teaching Certificate	439
Advanced Primary Teaching Certificate	125

Secondary English

From the National Teacher Training College (1980)

Secondary Teaching Certificate 30 (estimate)

From the National University of Lesotho

Diploma in Secondary Education	10
BA (Education)	30

In both the primary and the secondary sectors hardly any English specialist teachers exist, as primary teachers are expected to teach all subjects and secondary teachers two subjects. A fluctuating number of Peace Corps Volunteers are teaching in secondary schools with apparent and surprising success seeing that the curriculum is based on British examinations.

The recent (1982) Education Sector Survey report contained expressions of dissatisfaction with the continuing high proportion of untrained and unqualified teachers in the system and also with the standard (particularly in spoken and written English) of graduates of the National Teacher Training College.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

As mentioned above, the English panels of the Ministry of Education recommend varius texts but the schools, in practice, choose their own.

Primary Level

The reader is referred again to the Primary English Syllabus published in 1982 with the warning that there have been many complaints from the schools as to its comprehensibility.

Text Books in Use

Primary Sector: Day by Day is finally being phased out of the schools and a new locally developed (NCDC/Longman) course is coming in.

Primary English for Lesotho - Standards 1-4
plus Teachers' Guides by Merial Bloor, Thomas Bloor, Sarah Gcwabe and Peter Kaphe
(Longman Lesotho).

(Standards 1 and 2 plus Teachers' Guides are out in 1983)

Rainbow Red	-	Standard 5)	Plus Teachers' Guides
Rainbow Yellow	-	Standard 6)	by Roy Bevans and
Rainbow Blue	-	Standard 7)	Jean Bevans (Longman)

Secondary Sector

Course books recommended for use in the secondary schools are:

Practical English by P A Ogundipe and P S Tregidgo (Longman)
Effective English by K W Moody (Ed) (Evans)
Secondary English Project Books 1-5 by N Grant, D Olagoke and K Southern, (Longman).

The above texts are likely to be replaced by a locally developed course just coming out now (1983):

Secondary English Project for Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland
by Roy Bevan and Neville Grant (Longman).

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

As mentioned elsewhere, the Inspector of Primary English and the two Inspectors of Secondary English have been pulled into the National Curriculum Development Centre where they have been given mainly routine administrative duties. As well as these duties they are expected to take part in curriculum development and to produce syllabuses for Primary and Secondary English. They also take part in textbook writing in cooperation with commercial publishers, which is not an official duty but has nevertheless resulted in the new Primary English for Lesotho series described elsewhere.

These Inspectors and District Inspectors do not have the time, nor are they provided with, expenses or transport to visit schools regularly, a situation which is lamented by some but not all English teachers and Principals. Occasional mass inspections take place; there has been one such during the writer's three years in Lesotho.

One channel of communication has been the English Panels; one for primary and the other for secondary English. The Panels are chaired by the Inspectors and composed of representatives from the National University, the National Teacher Training College, Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre and one representative from each of the District English Teachers' Associations (DETAS). The Panel acts as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, the Curriculum Development Centre and to the Exams Council. Examiners for the Junior Certificate Examination are chosen by the Panel, usually from within its own ranks, and the examinations and curriculum are also overseeen by them. Normally the DETA representatives act as channels of communication between the teachers, the Panel and the Ministry representatives, who are the Inspectors of English.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

This has been devolved by the Ministry of Education upon its Curriculum Development Centre. This institution is in the process of finding its feet, a process long delayed because it is understaffed and underfinanced. The training of relevant personnel is proceeding slowly, however. One Inspector was sent to England for training under British Council auspices but was immediately transferred on completion of the training: a second has left for training and there is a KELT officer (Key English Language Training Scheme) in the English section of the CDC.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The present standard of English, which is said to be falling, can be seen as an aspect of the rapid and uncontrolled expansion of the school system to include children of average and below average abilities, coupled with a failure to train adequately the large number of teachers needed to staff the denominational schools that are springing up 'like mushrooms' according to local educationalists.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

A KELT officer was a Senior Lecturer in the Language and Social Education Department at the National University of Lesotho from November 1980 to October 1983. His job was to train two counterparts, Mrs Lifelile Matsoso and Mr Thekiso Khati, and to rewrite the English language teaching methods courses offered by the Education Faculty. A KELT officer has been placed in the National Curriculum Development Centre in Maseru to work with the English Inspectorate and Curriculum Developers.

Mr T Lynn, a Senior Lecturer in the English Department at NUL, developed the Common First Year Programme in English and teaches language and linguistics courses. He receives BESS supplementation from the British Expatriates Supplementation Scheme through the Overseas Development Administration.

Tapes, discs and films useful for ELT are regularly borrowed from the British Council's office in Maseru (see above), where a permanent display of ELBS (English Low Priced Book Scheme) editions is maintained. The Council's library serves, through its postal loan arrangements, as a most useful ELT resource centre for outlying areas. English is the main medium of instruction throughout the education system and educational books in all subjects are predominantly British.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

USAID is concerned with education generally rather than with English in particular. A few Peace Corps Volunteers work in education, and some have written self-instructional materials in English and ELT radio scripts, but none has been recruited to work solely or specifically in ELT. The USIS library in Maseru offers a limited chance of reading material in English.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

No direct support exclusively for English on the part of other agencies is known to the writer. The World Bank is funding a scheme to provide textbooks, including English textbooks, at very low cost in the Primary Sector. The scheme is being evaluated in the Thaba Tseka district (1983).

USAID are at present conducting field trials of inexpensive 'speak and display' teaching machines which aid the spelling of English.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

The commercial possibilities in English Language Teaching materials for the BOLESWA countries (Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) seem to be receiving the attention of the publishing houses, particularly Macmillan (Noleswa) and Longman, both of whom are developing primary and secondary materials in English Language Teaching based on the similar education situation of these three Southern African countries. There is a distinct gap in the area of upper secondary English at the moment, however.

Bookshops in Lesotho are neither numerous nor capacious. They regularly display ephemeral fiction and authors published by Penguin, Fontana and Heinemann (most conspicuously in the African Writers Series) in paperback editions but textbooks and non-fiction tend to occupy most of their shelf space.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

Writers' workshops are run by members of the English Department at the National University. A literary magazine called Seroki is published by the Morija Printing Works.

S N Guma, the author of The Form, Content and Technique of Traditional Literature in Southern Sotho, J L van Schaik, Pretoria, 1967, lives and works not in Lesotho, but in Swaziland. M Damane, a former British Council scholar is co-author of a book on Sesotho economiastic verse. An attempt is being made to encurae Basotho writing by the UNESCO-led Natinal Book Development Committee.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

There are no postgraduate research progammes in English at the National University of Lesotho at present. Any significant graduate studies in literature are more likely to be undertaken abroad than in Lesotho.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

The following sources should be consulted:

Regulations for the Junior Certificate Examinations published by the Exam Council.

The Primary English Syllabus for Lesotho 1982, published by the National Curriculum Development Centre.

The Secondary English Syllabus for Lesotho (due out early 1984), published by the National Curriculum Development Centre.

The Education Task Force Report 1983, published by the Ministry of Education.

Perspectives on Curriculum and Instruction: Teaching in Lesotho, editors: A Blair and F Scheru. Published by UNESCO: Paris.

15. GENERAL STATEMENT

Relations between Lesotho and Britain have remained close and friendly. Geography, tradition, and international politics have reinforced Lesotho's need for English both in education and in dealings with other countries. The demand for ELT is virtually unlimited. There is, however, no clear or coherent government policy for the use and teaching of English, and no unambiguous assessment of ELT needs and priorities. Resources in money, skilled manpower and materials are scarce, and well-qualified Basotho may succumb to the lure of higher pay or more comfortable conditions of work in other countries.